

# The Strange Case of Mrs. Arkwright.

**A**T FIRST, when she awoke, she was too terrified to move. She lay rigid in her bed for a minute or two, her heart pounding madly and her breathing strangled. Then, with an effort, she reached for the switch above her head and flooded the room with light.

It was a typical bedroom in an expensive English hotel, and the sight of it reassured her.

She got out of bed quickly, her breathing still rapid and her heart still racing like a runner's, and made her way unsteadily to a door across the room. Her hands trembled so that at first she could not open it; but at length she succeeded, and almost stumbled into the darkness it revealed.

"Derek!" she called, and again, "Derek! Derek!"

A man's voice answered, sleepily, "Hello! What is it?"

A switch snapped, and a moment later she was in the arms of her husband. She clung frantically to him.

"That dream! That awful dream! It's come again!" she panted.

Her eyes were still wide and staring with the horror of its recollection.

Her husband comforted her, though he himself felt the skin crawl upon his back.

"Don't think of it," he urged her. "Tomorrow you'll be seeing this Doctor Channing; and if he is half as good as they say, he'll certainly put an end to it."

Her grip tightened on his shoulders. "But suppose he can't? Suppose he's no better than all the others?" Her voice rose almost to a scream. "I can't stand it, Derek!" She was on the brink of hysteria.

Arkwright shivered. These scenes were awful. He suffered from them almost as much as she did. People in other rooms might hear her, too, and would think they were quarreling. The idea tortured him. He dreaded scenes. He hated anything disorderly, and his resentment at such times made him almost brutal.

"That's nonsense," he told her sharply. "You're giving way to an absurd extent, and as things are you've no right to let anything upset you. Every doctor has told you that."

She regained control with an effort, and they sat silently for a time on the side of his bed. She was a tall woman, with a fine figure and still finer face; and it seemed strangely incongruous to see her clinging for support to this frail man beside her.

He was her second husband, and was, both physically and mentally, typical of those who commonly fulfil that function. He was slight, orderly and decorous; he combined a love of comfort with a complete inability to earn the wherewithal to achieve it; and he had, therefore, for this rich woman he had married, a genuine sentiment of affection not entirely unmingled with gratitude.

Of the two, she was clearly the better man. Her black hair hung down in two thick plaits, framing a dead-white face from which her eyes, deep, dark and intensely vital, stared out above

a nose and chin more like a man's than a woman's in the strength and boldness of their outlines.

She scarcely spoke again, but continued to gaze rigidly before her; and gradually her habitual control asserted itself, and her momentary panic left her. But she did not return to her own bedroom. She could not bring herself to that yet. She spent the few hours that were left till morning, lying immobile by her



Illustrations by  
Pruett Carter

husband's side, hoping with agonized intensity that in the hands of this new doctor she would at last be freed from her torment.

For it was no exaggeration to say that of late this dream had made her life unbearable. It had occurred for the first time shortly after she knew she was to be a mother, and as time went on it had recurred, exact in every detail, at rapidly increasing intervals.

In it she seemed to be walking on a long and lonely road. She was barefooted, for she could feel the rough stones upon the soles of her feet and a cold wind upon her ankles. She was not afraid, though she seemed strangely aware none the less that some

# By Harold Dearden

A Drama from a  
Woman's

Subconscious Mind

She would stand there awhile, staring with agonized intensity at this appalling sight, and swept with a complexity of emotions she was always powerless to describe later. Horror, loneliness and self-pity seemed to strive with a feeling of overmastering tenderness towards someone whom she could not identify; till she would turn at length in her anguish to remove that horror from her view.

So she would stand for a moment, her back to those leaping flames, and feeling in some way throughout her being utterly deserted and defiled. Suddenly as she stood there she was freed, as by magic, from her anguish. She seemed now to be afraid no longer; but was filled instead

with a sense of courage and companionship, as though she were protecting someone dearer and weaker than herself.

So encouraged, she would lift her head, and there—lighted as it seemed by those gigantic flames behind her—her eyes would rest upon the outline of a Cross. Filled now with a subtle sense of strength and purpose, and feeling no longer lonely or afraid, she would begin her painful progress down the road again; and as she did so she emerged, invariably, into the waking state.

This nightmare, for so she had at first described it, would have been terrible enough as a single event; but its recurrence had made it of late a thing to poison her hours of rest and reduce her to a point of genuine nervous exhaustion.

It was from this incubus of terror that she looked to Channing to free her, and she told him her story in the morning with the first real feeling of hopefulness she had had at any of her interviews with doctors. For she had heard great things of him from former patients, and his appearance and manner, in addition, seemed to inspire her with confidence. Moreover, he was the first nerve-specialist she had consulted, and she hoped that what had been a mystery to others might be capable of solution by one who had given his life to the study of such matters.

Channing listened intently to the account of her experience, and noticed at once the profound emotional upheaval produced in her even by its description. But he was puzzled, none the less, to explain it. He was silent for a time, after she had finished; and when he spoke it was to ask her a question which surprised her.

"Is this your first child that you are expecting, Mrs. Arkwright?"

She hesitated a moment.


"Yes," she said at last; and Channing was quick to catch her meaning.

"You have lost a child, perhaps? Is that it?" he asked her gently.

She nodded; and again he noticed how moved she was at the recollection.

"I had a baby by my first husband," she murmured. "It died at birth. I was very ill at the time, and very unhappy," she added.

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"My husband never struck me after that first time, but I know he hated me more than ever. He never missed a chance to hurt me."

dreadful thing was to occur; and on this point, in describing her dream, she was always quite clear and insistent.

"It seems as though it just had to happen," she would say; and the distinction between that conviction and the emotion of fear was in some way real to her. Then, after what seemed to her an age-long journey down that road of pain, hemmed in on either side with an almost tangible darkness, she would come at length to a point where, on her left-hand side, the blackness seemed less dense.

And it was here that she felt the first real access of overmastering terror. Through this gap, far away in the darkness, she saw that which froze the blood in her veins and filled her with an indescribable convulsion of horror.

"Great jets of smoke and flame, tearing up the sky," she would say, when attempting to depict it later.

It seemed as though Hell gaped at her; and she knew, with that awful prescience so typical of dreams, that it was to Hell indeed that her bare feet were leading her—pitifully driven by some relentless urge—along that desolate road, alone.

Channing watched her with that veiled scrutiny which was habitual with him. This woman, he thought, would not be made unhappy easily. For it was to her marriage she had referred, he knew, in that simple statement. It would have been unnecessary otherwise. He must know more about that marriage.

But he must lead her to speak of it of her own accord, for only so would he hear the whole story. He knew too well the evasions and ambiguities so easy and so welcome in the direct answering of the most searching of questions. So he never asked direct questions except as a means of getting an unconscious answer to some other question which he dared not put. To get a patient to talk at all was usually sufficient for his purpose, for, once launched on a stream of conversation, it was rare that they did not at length let out the truth.

He began therefore by being strictly impersonal. No woman, when she generalizes, can avoid a personal application, so he started now with a little talk on dreams.

"They are just a hotchpotch of memories," he said easily, "like turning over a scrap-book at random, or picking up stray bits of a jig-saw puzzle. The scrap-book of your mind is what we call your subconsciousness, and its bits and pieces are the raw material of your dreams. That's why they are usually such rubbish, you know, and such meaningless jumbles of nonsense." He smiled encouragingly at her, but she did not smile in return.

"Mine isn't just a jumble," she said, with a shudder. "It's too terribly clear and vivid. And besides, it never varies. That's what makes it so awful."

"I know," replied Channing. "I've been told that so often that I've no doubt of it."

Mrs. Arkwright turned to him quickly. "You've known others, then, who have dreamed the same thing, like I do, over and over again?"

For the first time a note of relief sounded in her voice. It was something to feel that she was not the only one on whom this ghastly thing had fallen.

Channing turned in his swivel chair, and rifled the pages of his bulky case-book, filled with the records of his patients' woes.

"I could read you plenty of stories here, just like your own," he said.

"And you cured them?"

"I think I can say I helped all of them to cure themselves. That's getting as near boasting as I like to permit myself."

Again he smiled warmly at her, and this time he was rewarded. She sat a little straighter in her chair, and her voice shook when she spoke next.

"Then for heaven's sake help me!" she said huskily. "I thought when I married this time that I had done with horrors forever."

Channing was never so casual as when he spoke with a purpose, and he toyed now with his tortoise-shell glasses as though he were making small talk over the tea-table.

"As a rule recurrent dreams are due to the fact that some original impression has been so violent that it emerges, not as a jumble, but as a whole, with every detail of the incident almost as vivid as the original. That was the case, of course, with the 'battle-dreams' of shell-shocked soldiers. In your case, of course, that can't be the explanation. But a recurrent dream may be the symbol of some such experience. It is sometimes a symbol, for instance, of some period when the dreamer was profoundly unhappy, living in terror of someone, or something of that sort, you know."

Mrs. Arkwright's eyes were burning, and there was a flush on her high cheek-bones.

"You mean it would help you—to cure such a person—if you knew that?" she said.

Channing was even more casual than before. "That's the sort of thing," he answered, and continued to play with his glasses.

There was a long silence. He never so much as glanced at her; for he knew that a word of encouragement to a woman of her type would be fatal. If she was to confide at all, she herself must decide to do so. A trace of coaxing or sympathy would shut him out for good.



For a moment, in her dream, Mrs. Arkwright would

So he waited patiently, seemingly absorbed in his thoughts and his plaything.

Suddenly she spoke and, her reticence once abandoned, her words poured out in a torrent, low-pitched but quick, and almost staccato with emotion.

"I shall have to tell you about my first marriage," she began. "After what you have said I can see there is no help for me unless I do so."

"I think you are wise," Channing said quietly.

She looked away from him, sitting very still with her hands in her lap; but he saw how her fine eyes hardened, as though what she saw was disgusting. Then she told him her story, clearly and precisely, choosing her words with care, and only now and again betraying in her look or tone the effect it produced upon her.

"My first husband was a vile man, Doctor Channing. I was only a girl when I married him, but even I had heard stories of



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him which, though I understood only a part of them, had made him a sort of legend in our part of the country. But my father wished me to marry him. We were small yeoman farmers ourselves, my father was extravagant and ambitious, and the match was, materially, a brilliant one for me. So I married this rich man, and almost from the first day I regretted it.

"He was a large landowner in our part of Lancashire, and his collieries and steel-works in addition brought him in a very large income, every penny of which he used to gratify his vices. He was a libertine and a blackguard; and some of his villainies could have been possible only in so wild a district as that in which we lived. He was fifty and I was twenty, and my father on his death-bed asked my pardon for having urged me to marry him."

She turned to Channing for a moment, and her eyes were filled with loathing.

"I am trying not to exaggerate," she said, "but if ever the

Devil took human form I believe he did so in the case of that man."

"He ill-treated you, I suppose?" said Channing.

Mrs. Arkwright smiled grimly. "He did," she said quietly—"once. He drank; and once when he could not move me to tears by his words, he struck me." The knuckles glistened on her strong right hand. "He was a little man; and I thrashed him with a dog-whip till he was sober."

"That was very brave of you," said Channing impulsively. "But why did you not leave him?"

She answered him at once. "I was too proud," she said. "We are a strange people in those parts, you know; there is a saying that we make good friends but worse enemies. But more than anything else we cannot bear to be beaten. I knew what had been said by others when I married, and I was determined not to give in. Besides, that was just what he wanted—to break my spirit. So I had every reason for staying."

She stated the fact so quietly that it carried conviction, and the picture of these two bitter haters living under the same roof and sharing the same bed was not a pleasant one to contemplate.

Mrs. Arkwright began again: "He never laid hands on me after that first

time I've told you about, but I knew that because of it he hated me more than ever. He was clever and I am not; and he never missed a chance when alone or with others to hurt and humiliate me. And he could do it, too, in such a way as made me seem at all times in the wrong. He had a sneering way of talking which was detestable; and he seemed to take a savage delight in pointing out the evil side in every human relation."

A wave of crimson swept her neck and face, subsiding as suddenly as it had arisen, and leaving her paler even than before. For a second she was plainly unable to continue, and her lower lip whitened as she stilled it with her teeth. Never, thought Channing, had he seen such iron control. It was almost painful to witness in a woman.

"He was vile, too, in other ways," she said at length; and Channing did not press her to explain. (Continued on page 108)



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himself. "That was my life for three years, Doctor Channing; and every day of that time I thanked God that we had no children. I had made my own bed and I was prepared to lie on it, but the idea of exposing a child to his bestiality was something I dared not think about. So you can imagine how I felt when, after three years of this life with him, I knew I was going to be a mother."

Her voice shook and faltered; but her eyes remained dry and hard as ever.

"It filled me with despair," she went on. "It was the one thing I had dreaded. I had beaten him so far, far nothing he could say or do could hurt me. My heart was like a stone. But a baby would soften it; and then he would break us both. He told me that himself."

CHANNING was silent. Of all the glimpses he had had of broken lives and human shame and folly, this seemed to him the worst.

"I don't know how I got through those next few months," the quiet voice continued. "He was always watching me with his bright little eyes; and his tongue was always ready with some sly remark to show me he was waiting."

"He drank now more than ever. Night after night I had to sit opposite him at the dinner table. And night after night I left him there, still drinking; till hours later I would hear him come stumbling up the bare oak stairs into his bedroom at the far end of the corridor from mine."

He was always a bad sleeper. He used to dose himself with brandy when he woke, as he usually did, in the early hours of the morning. The result was, of course, that he slept late; and we used to be as quiet as ever we could in the mornings, so as not to wake him."

Channing could imagine the suspense which gripped that silent household, till the master should descend—white, stupid and venomous—to start another day again. But the impersonal interest of the chief sufferer was abnormal enough to arouse him.

"You were telling me about your baby," he said. "Anything was better than that attitude of mind."

"I lost it," she said simply. "It was born too soon. I don't know what happened. I was delicious, I think, at the time. And when I recovered they told me my husband was dead."

"Your husband—?" began Channing; but she had scarcely stopped when she went on again.

"He had gone to bed sodden with drink as usual and had apparently smothered himself in his pillows."

"Yes," agreed Channing. "I have known that to happen in other cases."

She continued as though he never had spoken. "He was found there by his servants in the morning, when they went to tell him about me." She pressed her fingers to her eyes again. "I think that's all," she said quietly. "I had prayed for one or the other to be taken. But of course there was no need for both."

She dropped her hands in her lap again, and looked straight at Channing. She was as composed and as dignified as when she had first shaken hands with him.

He began at once to explain to her the value of what she had told him. She asked for help; and it was likely, he told himself, that he was the first human being to whom she had made that appeal.

He interpreted her dream for her, therefore, using all his skill and persuasiveness to make himself convincing.

The rough and painful road she had traveled was surely the life she had described to him, with its hopeless and terrifying prospect such as she herself had visualized at the time. Through that gap in the darkness she had looked upon that future, lighted with the flames that always are associated with the extremities of mental or physical pain.

The symbol of the Cross she saw when she turned her back on those leaping flames needed

no interpretation. For it was that symbol which, with its promise of divine help, had encouraged her to continue.

He elaborated this in detail. He told her that, and she not sought so violently to bury it, the memory of that unhappy life of hers long ago would have faded. It was her own refusal to think of it which forced it to seek this back-door entrance to her consciousness, and to emerge in disguise as a dream.

What she had to do now was clear enough. She must dig up from the recesses of her memory every detail, no matter how painful, of those dreadful years; and she must force herself to recall them, not with a stony and impersonal rigidity, but with the natural emotions of a sentient human being. Then only would those memories be at rest, and no longer haunt the confines of her dreams.

She agreed to take his advice. Day after day, at his instructions, she came and laid bare before him the whole of that period of her life. And gradually, as she did so, she recovered, and her increased confidence helped her to persevere.

She still dreamed, it is true, of the same appalling sequence of events; but the occurrence became rarer, and distressed her, in addition, progressively less and less. Finally, after some months of treatment, Channing told her to desist. "What you want now is a holiday," he said. "You've worked hard enough, too, to deserve one."

It was autumn when they had finished, and a dense fog hung over the West End of London; but to Mrs. Arkwright the day seemed bright and cheerful enough. She looked at him, with her deep eyes free from a trace of strain or sleeplessness; and in her heavy fur, with her splendid figure, she looked. Channing thought, magnificent.

"Yes," she said, in that rich voice of hers, "I'm free. I know that now. But do you know what I'm going to do to prove it?"

Channing watched her, smiling. There were the rare moments which made his work worth while. He had set a bond-slave free again.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

"I'm going down into Lancashire to open the old house. It will be my first visit since my husband died. I shall spend Christmas there; and my baby will be born there too. That's just to prove to you, and myself, that I'm afraid of the past no longer."

She put out her hand, and her eyes were warm and friendly. "I can't thank you," she said, "for what you've done for me."

He took her hand, and a moment later she had gone.

For two months Channing heard no news of her; but he was too busy usually to give much thought to patients, once they had passed out of his hands. He was aware, too, that the gratitude of patients such as his, rare enough in itself, still more rarely led them to a desire to see more of him. He knew too much about them to make social intercourse easy for them.

But early in December he was surprised to receive from Mrs. Arkwright a cordial letter of invitation to spend Christmas in Lancashire.

He accepted with a readiness which surprised him, for he was a lonely man in spite of a thousand acquaintances, and at five o'clock on the twenty-fourth of December he arrived at his destination. He was amazed at the beauty of the property they owned.

The house stood high on a ridge looking down a valley, just where the fields gave place to open moors; and for miles in all directions the land was just as it had been before the great industrial wave had engulfed the country as a whole. Only over the end of the valley hung the heavy pall of smoke which marked the town of coal and iron-works whose pits and furnaces, day and night, belched out money for these distant owners. He was the only guest, since Mrs. Arkwright expected her baby early in the New Year.

It amused him to see the change which had

come over the relative attitudes of his host and hostess. She was quietly and deeply contented. She had had no recurrence of her dream and the peace of prospective motherhood lay upon her like a mantle.

But Arkwright, also, had developed. As she had become gentle, his dominance had increased. He was a magistrate now, and his talk was full of the duties of his position.

"We had a lot to live down when we came here," he said, as he showed Channing to his room. "But I think we are known now for what we are, and this house and its owners are respected in the county."

"Well, the house has a very different master, in the first place," said Channing.

The little man glowed with the flattery implied. "I hope so," he said, with a mock of humility which delighted Channing. "There is nothing to hide from the world in my life, at any rate."

The comparison to the man he had supplanted clearly gave him pleasure.

"By the way, this is the room he died in," he said suddenly. "I hope you don't mind?"

Channing chuckled. "Not the least," he answered. "It's a charming room, and I'll sleep none the worse in it for its previous occupant."

After dinner Mrs. Arkwright left them. She was tired, she said. And for some reason, as she admitted to Channing, she felt a little nervous in addition.

"It's foolish of me," she said laughingly, "but for the first time since we came here I feel I rather regret it." She looked around her almost with apprehension. "The past seems so close around me," she said slowly. "I expect that's the approach of Christmas making me sentimental."

She finished bravely enough; but Channing knew that her nerves were ruffled, nevertheless.

"Or having me here," he said. "And getting my room ready," he added significantly.

She flushed a little, for she was always quick to see his meaning.

"Well, it's nonsense at any rate, whatever it is," she was ashamed to confess to backsliding. "I'm in my old room, too; and I mean to stay there. Good night. I won't fail you."

She smiled bravely as she left him, but Channing could see that the smile had not been achieved without an effort. He hoped from the bottom of his heart that his visit would not provoke disaster.

Arkwright, however, had no such qualms. "She'll laugh at herself for that tomorrow," he asserted confidently. "I always told her that was the best thing to do, long before she saw you at all."

"A woman will always obey a stranger in preference to a husband," remarked Channing. "I sometimes think it's my main function to tell unpleasant truths to ladies."

Arkwright puffed contentedly at his cigar. The world was plainly in excellent order so far as he was concerned.

"She made quite a mystery of that wretched dream at one time. Talked of warnings, you know, and all sorts of nonsense."

Channing was momentarily nettled. It annoyed him that this woman's gallantry should have seemed nonsense. And especially that it should have seemed nonsense to Arkwright. Definitely Arkwright must not be permitted to disparage her. When he spoke next, therefore, he said perhaps just a little more than was wise of him.

"I don't think she made a mystery of it, really," he said. "It was a mystery, you know. In fact, to tell you the truth, it is to some extent a mystery to me still."

Arkwright looked at him in surprise. "But you explained it all to her," he said, almost resentfully. "She told me so. I thought that was how you did it. Cured people, I mean."

"I gave your wife an explanation which happily satisfied her," Channing admitted. "But

I should hate to have it criticized by another psychologist, all the same."

"Oh well," said Arkwright, "it worked anyway. That is the only thing that matters, after all." He had no patience with these experts quibbling over details.

"That's true," replied Channing, and hoped that would be the end of it. He was angry with himself for having been led to say so much.

There was a pause for a while in the conversation, and the two men smoked and stared into the fire, listening to the wind roaring in the big chimney, as a storm swept down the valley from the moors behind the house.

But Arkwright's mind was troubled. He detected irregularities and things incomplete, in disorder. "What was there about it you didn't understand?" he asked suddenly.

Channing, faced with the direct question, could find no room for evasion.

"I'll tell you," he said after a moment's hesitation. "The fact that the dream was recurrent in type was, and is still, my chief difficulty. Most dreams are symbols of the dreamer's state of mind, since they are his own elaboration of a meaningless picture. But recurrent dreams are in a class apart. There one is dealing with the emergence into the sleeper's mind, not of a jumble of detached and disconnected memories, but of one whole memory, of a complete incident which has actually happened."

"Actually happened?" broke in Arkwright. "But surely you don't suggest that my wife's dream ever happened?"

"That's precisely one of the difficulties I referred to," replied Channing quietly. "Obviously such an incident never happened. But we are dealing with a recurrent dream none the less, and it ought to have happened," he ended obstinately. And in a few words he explained, as he had done to his patient, the significance of the battle-dreams of soldiers.

"But that is simply quibbling!" cried Arkwright when he had finished. "Just because

my wife's case is different, you say you're not satisfied. The whole thing seems absurd."

He was brusque almost to the point of rudeness. It offended him that his wife's case was different from the rest. She was a normal and proper person; and her dreams—though they might be unpleasant, of course—must be normal and proper too. Any suggestion to the contrary was objectionable and absurd.

Channing noticed his annoyance and understood also the cause of it; for the mind of his host was of a shallowness which presented few difficulties to his acutely trained perceptions. Moreover, the fact that this was his host alarmed Channing. He gave way therefore, retreating so skilfully that the other was satisfied that his ridiculous quibbles were silenced, and Arkwright finished the evening in the somewhat pompous complacency habitual to him.

They ascended the staircase at length together, chatting amiably of commonplace matters, and paused at its head to say good night. The landing on which they stood formed part of a corridor running the full length of the house. Channing's room was down on the right, at the opposite end to the Arkwrights'; and his host waited, with typical punctiliousness, while he walked along the corridor towards it.

Suddenly Channing halted, turned round to his host and called: "Arkwright, come here a moment, will you!" His voice was low and tense.

Arkwright joined him and, obeying his gesture, looked to his left from the window in the corridor which gave a view over the valley.

"Oh, yes," he said casually, "those are our blast-furnaces. They're never let out, day or night, you know." He glanced at Channing as he spoke; and what he saw startled him.

Channing was speaking, too, almost to himself. "Great jets of smoke and flame, tearing up the sky."

"What do you mean," Arkwright said testily. But the phrase was too familiar to escape

recognition; and it was in a different tone that he said again, "Channing! What do you mean?"

But Channing had not done yet.

"Look behind you," he said. And this time there was something in his voice which terrified Arkwright. "Look on the wall behind you," repeated Channing; and as he spoke he turned the switch at his elbow and plunged the corridor in darkness. "Do you see?" he continued, almost in a whisper. "The shadows of these window-bars form a gigantic Cross."

Arkwright looked and shuddered. Then he turned and, like a man in a trance, stared silently down that long corridor towards his own room—and his wife's. But his head was out-thrust and rigid, as though he stared at something that he feared.

And Channing stared also, as in the minds of both of them the same picture took form and grew. In that picture, from that distant door they saw a woman come. A woman of matchless resolution and indomitable purpose, blindly obeying, in the grip of her delirium, an urge which consciously would have filled her with abhorrence. It seemed to Channing that he saw her, wide-eyed and muttering, stumbling on bare and dragging feet to the spot where now they stood.

He saw her recoil in terror from the window, to draw fresh courage to her tortured mind from the symbol of that shadow on the opposite wall. And he saw her still, that Roman woman, entering the room which now was his, forcing those hands, which once had used a dog-whip, to fulfil a task more dreadful but more sure. "I had always prayed that one or the other should be taken," she had told him.

But she had done more than pray. He knew that now, though she herself was unaware of it.

"So it was a battle-dream, after all," he said; and his voice in the silence startled him.

He heard a noise of shuffling at his elbow, and turned in time to catch Arkwright as he fell.